

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 02563 01 OF 02 021208Z
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 TRSE-00 MCT-01 IO-13 AID-05
HEW-04 ACDA-12 EB-08 SIL-01 LAB-04 /130 W
-----049133 021303Z /41

R 021100Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 510
INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMCONSUL MADRAS
USICA WASHDC

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 COLOMBO 2563

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, CE, PINS

SUBJ: SRI LANKA GOVERNMENT ADDRESSES TAMIL ISSUES

1. SUMMARY: TWO DEVELOPMENTS IN PAST WEEK INDICATE GSL IS TAKING STEPS TO MEET TAMIL GRIEVANCES AND AT SAME TIME TO RESTRICT NEWS OF "LIBERATION TIGERS" TERRORIST ACTIVITIES IN EFFORT TO FACILITATE POLICE INVESTIGATION AND UNDERCUT FURTHER TAMIL SUPPORT FOR MILITANT MOVEMENT. PRESS REPORTED NEW CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS TO GUARANTEE USE OF TAMIL AS A NATIONAL LANGUAGE IN LEGISLATURE, EDUCATION, ADMINISTRATION, AND COURTS. FOLLOWING PASSAGE OF BILL PROSCRIBING THE "LIBERATION TIGERS," NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY PLACED EMBARGO ON PUBLICATION OF NEWS RELATING TO ANY SUCH PROSCRIBED ORGANIZATION. END SUMMARY.

2. TWO UNREALIZED DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PAST WEEK SEEM TO IN-

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PAGE 02 COLOMB 02563 01 OF 02 021208Z

DICATE THAT GSL IS SENSITIVE TO TAMIL GRIEVANCES AND IS PREPARED TO TAKE STEPS TO CARRY OUT ITS ELECTION PLEDGES TO IMPROVE RELATIONS BETWEEN MAJORITY SINHALESE AND MINORITY TAMIL COMMUNITIES.

3. GOVERNMENT-OWNED "SUNDAY OBSERVER" OF MAY 28 CARRIED FRONT-PAGE STORY BY RELIABLE REPORTER QUOTING "INFORMED POLITICAL

SOURCES" TO EFFECT THAT WHILE SINHALA WILL REMAIN THE "OFFICIAL" LANGUAGE OF SRI LANKA, BOTH SINHALA AND TAMIL WILL ENJOY THE STATUS OF "NATIONAL" LANGUAGES UNDER THE CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES SOON TO BE PROPOSED BY A PARLIAMENTARY SELECT COMMITTEE. THESE CHANGES, ACCORDING TO THE REPORT, WOULD PROVIDE CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES FOR THE USE OF TAMIL IN THE NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY BY AN MP IF HE CHOOSES TO DO SO, AND AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN THE SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITY. TAMIL WOULD BE RECOGNIZED AS A LANGUAGE OF ADMINISTRATION AND OF THE COURTS IN THE TAMIL-SPEAKING AREAS OF THE NORTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES. MOST OF THESE RIGHTS ARE IN EXISTENCE NOW, BUT LARGELY AS A RESULT OF SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION AND NOT AS PROVISIONS OF THE CONSTITUTION.

4. AT THIS EARLY DATE WE CAN ONLY ANTICIPATE PUBLIC REACTION TO THE PROPOSED CHANGES. IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT CWC LEADER S. THONDAMAN, REPRESENTING THE PLANTATION (INDIAN) TAMILS WHO CONSTITUTE OVER 40 PERCENT OF THE COUNTRY'S TAMIL POPULATION, IS A MEMBER OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE AND IS REPORTEDLY IN AGREEMENT WITH THE PROPOSALS. THE TULF LEADERSHIP DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE SELECT COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS AND HAS SO FAR NOT COMMENTED ON THE PROPOSED CHANGES. IT IS BELIEVED THAT MOST TULF MP'S ARE WILLING TO RESPOND FAVORABLY TO RECENT GOVERNMENT OVERTURES, INCLUDING THE OFFER OF DISTRICT MINISTRIES UNDER ANOTHER PROVISION OF THE NEW DRAFT CONSTITUTION, BUT DO NOT WANT TO APPEAR AS HAVING COMPROMISED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 COLOMB 02563 01 OF 02 021208Z

THEMSELVES THROUGH TOO CLOSE COOPERATION WITH A "SINHALESE GOVERNMENT," ESPECIALLY NOW THAT TERRORIST ACTIVITIES OF THE MILITANT TAMIL YOUTH "LIBERATION TIGERS" HAVE ESCALATED. THE MILITANTS WILL SEE THE NEW LANGUAGE PROVISION AS A MERE TOKEN GESTURE AND WILL STICK TO THEIR DEMAND FOR A SEPARATE TAMIL STATE.

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 COLOMBO 2563

5. IN THE PAST, VARIOUS CEYLONese GOVERNMENTS HAVE RUN THE RISK OF ADVERSE SINHALESE REACTION WHENEVER CONCESSIONS TO THE TAMILS HAVE BEEN MADE. RESENTMENT OF TAMIL "PRIVILEGES" DURING THE BRITISH PERIOD AND OF TAMIL SEPARATENESS IN LANGUAGE AND RELIGION RUNS DEEP AMONG A LARGE SEGMENT OF SINHALESE SOCIETY, AND IT IS LIKELY THAT THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES, THOUGH HARDLY OF A RADICAL NATURE, WILL PROVOKE CRITICISM AND SOME SLIPPAGE IN UNP POLITICAL SUPPORT. MILITANT BUDDHIST ORGANIZATIONS, WHO PROTESTED THIS GOVERNMENT'S ELIMINATION OF "STANDARDIZATION" OF MARKS AS A BASIS OF UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS, MAY BE EXPECTED TO RAISE THEIR VOICES IN PROTEST AGAIN.

6. ON MAY 26 THE GSL IMPOSED CENSORSHIP ON MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE PROSCRIBED "LIBERATION TIGERS" AND OTHER TERRORIST MOVEMENTS IN LINE WITH BILLS PASSED IN THE NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY ON MAY 18 AND 19. SECRETARY TO THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 COLOMB 02563 02 OF 02 021213Z

BROADCASTING SARATH AMUNUGAMA, WHO WAS NAMED NATIONAL COMPETENT AUTHORITY FOR CENSORSHIP, PRIVATELY TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE WAS CLEARING STORIES BY PHONE AND EXPECTED CENSORSHIP TO BE LIFTED IN 1-2 WEEKS. DURING A PRESS CONFERENCE ON MAY 29, HE SAID CENSORSHIP MEASURES APPLIED TO FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' REPORTS AND EVEN TO REFERENCES IN SPEECHES.

7. THE PRESS IN GENERAL SEEMS TO ACCEPT CENSORSHIP--AS IT HAS IN THE PAST--AS A TEMPORARY MEASURE SEEKING TO AVOID COMMUNAL DISTURBANCES SIMILAR TO LAST AUGUST'S, AND EXPECTS IT TO END UPON COMPLETION OF THE POLICE INVESTIGATION OF MEN ARRESTED LAST WEEK, WHO ARE SAID TO BE WANTED IN CONNECTION WITH TERRORIST ACTIVITIES. MANY TAMIL JOURNALISTS, HOWEVER, EXPRESS AN INCREASING SUSPICION THAT THE WHOLE "LIBERATION TIGERS" MOVEMENT IS A POLICE CONCOCTION, THAT

ALTHOUGH THERE IS OBVIOUSLY A GROUP OF YOUNG TAMIL DISSIDENTS, THEY FEEL THAT IT IS NOW LOOSELY ORGANIZED, AND THAT THE POLICE ARE REALLY TRYING TO DIVERT ATTENTION FROM GENUINE COMPLAINTS BY UNEMPLOYED TAMIL YOUTH. THEY POINT TO THE FACT THAT OF THE THIRTY-EIGHT YOUNG MEN WHOSE PHOTOS WERE PRINTED IN NEWSPAPERS ON A MOST-WANTED LIST, OVER THIRTY OF THEM SUR- RENDERED PEACEFULLY THROUGH THE OPPOSITION TULF. MOST HAD BEEN IN THEIR HOMES OR OPENLY AT WORK AT THE TIME OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT AND NO ATTEMPT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN MADE TO FIND THEM BEFOREHAND. CONCERN IS ALSO EXPRESSED THAT THE BILL PROSCRIBING THE "TIGERS" MIGHT ALSO BE USED AGAINST OTHER OPPOSITION GROUPS. HOWEVER, OTHER TAMIL EDITORS WE HAVE TALKED TO FEEL THAT THE "TIGERS" ARE A SERIOUS THREAT TO LAW AND ORDER AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS JUSTIFIED IN TRYING TO DENY THEM PUBLICITY FOR THEIR CAUSE. TAMIL NEWSPAPERS OF THE INDEPENDENT EXPRESS AND VIRAKESARI GROUPS HAVE DECIDED TO PUBLISH FEWER REPORTS ON THE "TIGERS." LEVIN

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